

Message Text

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ACTION INR-07

INFO OCT-01 ARA-06 ISO-00 CIAE-00 NSAE-00 /014 W

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R 062215Z JUL 76

FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3868

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 3285

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, HO

SUBJECT: BIO-DATA ON NEW HONDURAN FONMIN COL. ROBERTO PALMA GALVEZ

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 3278

1. COL. ROBERTO PALMA GALVEZ WAS CHIEF OF THE HONDURAN PERMANENT DELEGATION TO THE CENTRAL AMERICAN DEFENSE COUNCIL IN GUATEMALA CITY FROM 1964 UNTIL THE 1969 WAR WITH EL SALVADOR; AFTERWARDS HE WAS THE HONDURAN OBSERVER TO THE ORGANIZATION FROM THEN UNTIL HE WAS NAMED FONMIN ON JULY 2, 1976. PALMA IS CONSIDERED A CAPABLE HONDURAN OFFICER, AND IS ONE OF THE FEW OFFICERS WITH A UNIVERSITY EDUCATION. REPORTEDLY, HE IS INTELLIGENT, INDUSTRIOUS, HAS A DEEP SENSE OF DUTY AND AN INTENSE INTEREST IN THE HONDURAN ARMED FORCES. HE WAS REPUTED TO BE THE POWER BEHIND THE THRONE IN THE MINISTRY OF WAR, NAVY AND AIR DURING 1949-55 BUT WAS RARELY SEEN IN PUBLIC. HE WAS APPARENTLY WELL LIKED AND RESPECTED BY FELLOW OFFICERS. HE ACTED AS SECRETARY TO THE MILITARY JUNTA THAT GOVERNED HONDURAS IN 1957. HE ATTEMPTED TO REMAIN ALOOF FROM GOVERNMENTAL ACTIVITIES FOLLOWING THE OCTOBER 1963 COUP IN WHICH THE MILITARY SEIZED CONTROL OF THE GOVERNMENT BUT WAS APPARENTLY NOT TRUSTED BY THE COUP LEADER, OSWALDO LOPEZ ARELLANO.

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2. PALMA IS DEFINITELY PRO-U.S. AND ANTI-COMMUNIST. HE EXPRESSED A GREAT DESIRE IN 1961 TO HAVE HIS ELDEST SON ATTEND THE U.S. MILITARY ACADEMY AT WEST POINT. HE IS STRONGLY PATRIOTIC AND OPPOSES LOSS OF HONDURAN IDENTITY AS AN INDEPENDENT COUNTRY WITHIN A CENTRAL AMERICAN UNION.

3. PALMA WAS A MEMBER OF THE NATIONALIST PARTY AND IS FROM A POLITICALLY IMPORTANT FAMILY IN THAT PARTY. HE IS THE NEPHEW OF FORMER NATIONALIST LEADER, JUAN MANUEL GALVEZ, PRESIDENT FROM 1949-54. PALMA WAS DISLIKED BY MANY ELEMENTS OF THE LIBERAL PARTY FOR ALLEGED POLITICAL FAVORITISM WHILE HE WAS THE EXECUTIVE OFFICER IN THE MINISTRY OF WAR, NAVY, AND AIR AND BECAUSE OF HIS ASSOCIATION WITH THE JUNTA IN 1957. HE AVOIDS DISCUSSING HONDURAN POLITICAL MATTERS BUT FIRMLY BELIEVES THAT THE MILITARY MUST REMAIN AS THE FINAL ARBITER OF HONDURAN POLITICS.

4. PALMA WAS BORN ON DECEMBER 12, 1917 IN TEGUCIGALPA, HONDURAS. HIS FATHER, COL. ANDRES PALMA, A MEXICAN, WAS MILITARY ADVISER TO HONDURAN PRESIDENT CARIAS. HIS MOTHER WAS A HONDURAN AND THE SISTER OF FORMER PRESIDENT GALVEZ. HIS WIFE IS MARTA CERNA DE PALMA. THEY HAVE FOUR CHILDREN: ANDRES ROBERTO, LEOPOLDO ENRIQUE, CARLOS ALEJANDRO, AND LUIS FEDERICO. HE SPEAKS SPANISH AND SOME FRENCH AND ENGLISH.

5. PALMA'S PRIMARY SCHOOLING WAS IN TEGUCIGALPA. HE RECEIVED A LAW DEGREE FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF HONDURAS IN 1948.

6. FROM HIS ENTRY INTO THE ARMY TO THE PRESENT PALMA HAS HELD A WIDE VARIETY OF MILITARY POSITIONS. THE MOST SIGNIFICANT ARE HIS 1949-55 SERVICE AS EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF THE MINISTRY OF WAR, NAVY AND AIR; 1957-58 SERVICE AS SECRETARY OF THE MILITARY JUNTA; VARIOUS COMMANDS IN THE FIELD; AND FINALLY HIS POSITION AS CHIEF OF THE HONDURAN PERMANENT DELEGATION AND HONDURAN OBSERVER TO THE CENTRAL AMERICAN DEFENSE COUNCIL.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CABINET, BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION, PERSONNEL APPOINTMENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 06 JUL 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: powellba
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976TEGUCI03285
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760261-1179
From: TEGUCIGALPA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760786/aaaacydd.tel
Line Count: 108
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION INR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 TEGUCIGALPA 3278
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: powellba
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 16 JUL 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <16 JUL 2004 by izenbei0>; APPROVED <26 OCT 2004 by powellba>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: BIO-DATA ON NEW HONDURAN FONMIN COL. ROBERTO PALMA GALVEZ
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, PGOV, HO, (PALMA GALVEZ, ROBERTO)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006